

ARTISAN

VLO™ Program

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VARI*LITE®

The Automated Lighting Company

Artisan VLQ™

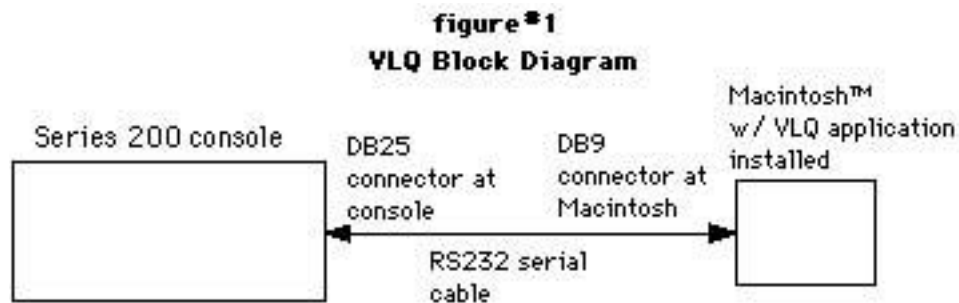
board-level cueing program

Introduction

This month's article focuses on Artisan VLQ, a Vari-Lite show control software program developed for use on the Series 200™ Artisan console. Like MIDI, VLQ allows operators to record a series of console keystrokes and play them back instantly by pressing the mouse button or space bar on a computer. One of the advantages of using VLQ over MIDI is that all console keys are supported. MIDI can only trigger certain keys on the console. In addition, this article will preview the soon to be released Artisan VLQ version 2.0 which adds many new features including MIDI note triggering, MIDI Show Control and MIDI TimeCode support.

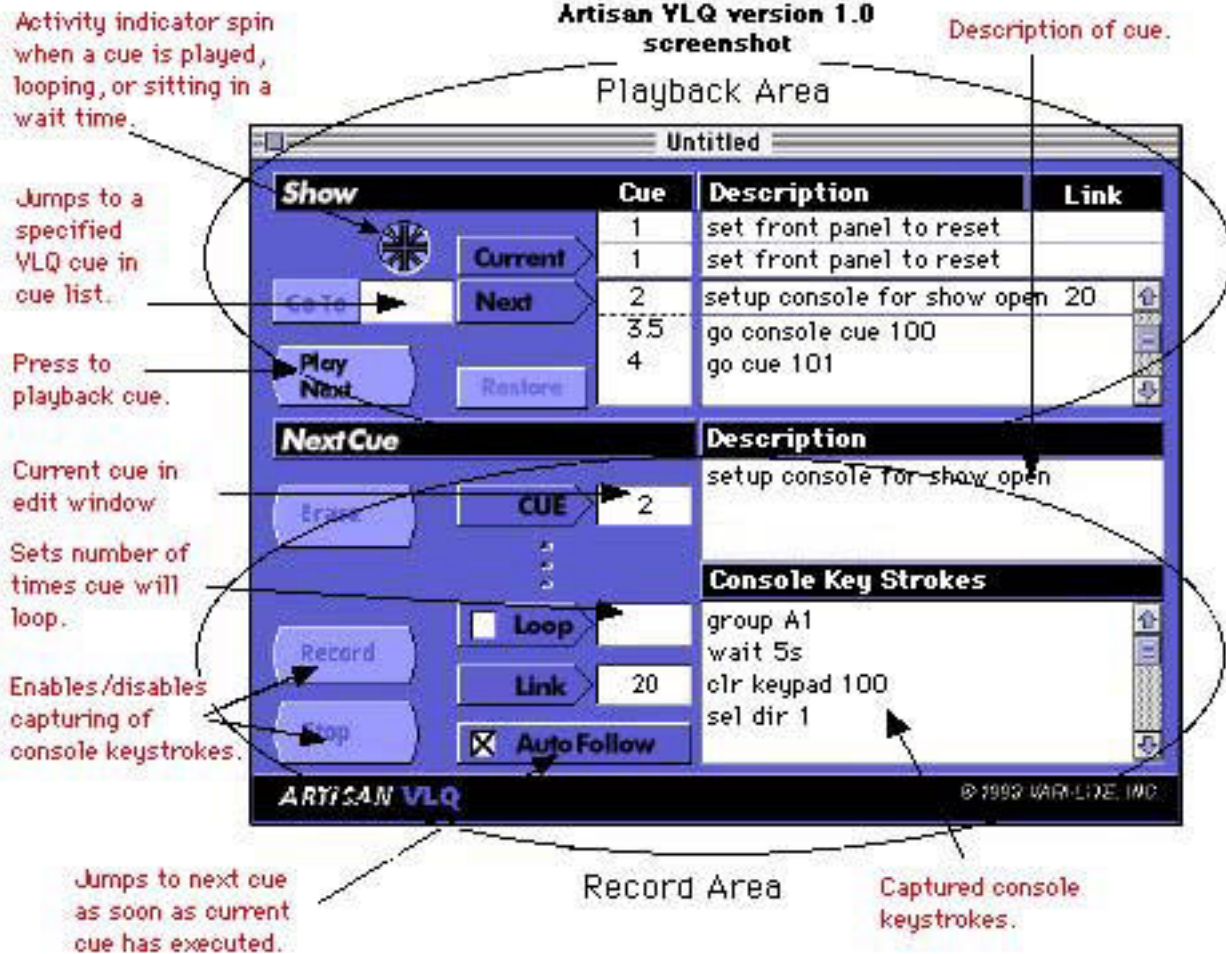
The Basics

The Artisan VLQ program is supplied with all Vari-Lite Series 200 control consoles, which include the Artisan® Plus, mini-Artisan® Plus and mini-Artisan® 2. The VLQ program operates on a Macintosh™ computer (Power Macintosh™ only for version 2.0). The program uses one of the Macintosh serial ports to send and receive data from the console via a RS-232 serial interface cable. (See Figure#1) The serial port is configurable from transmission rates of 2400 - 38400 bits per second.



The screenshot (See Figure#2) shows the VLQ program, version 1.1 interface window. The upper portion of the interface screen consists of a scrollable cue list window which displays the current and next VLQ cues within a sequence. The Goto button allows the user to quickly jump to a specific VLQ cue within a sequence. The lower portion of the screen displays the record and edit areas. This window displays the actual console keystrokes that have been captured by the VLQ program.

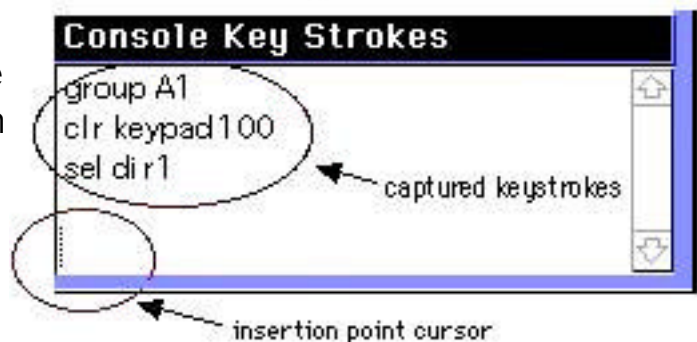
figure #2
Artisan VLQ version 1.0
screenshot



How Does It Work?

The VLQ program uses serial text strings to electronically depress keys on the console front panel. Every key on the console's front panel has been assigned a text label such as "Group A" or "Preset Color Bank 1". When a console key is pressed and released by the console operator, the text label for each key is transmitted out of the console's serial port. When the VLQ program is placed in Record mode, the key labels are captured into the VLQ program's console keystroke window. (See Figure#3) Once all the keystrokes are recorded, VLQ can assign a logical cue number to the the captured sequence.

figure #3
Console Keystrokes Window



To playback a cue the user simply clicks on the Play / Next button. Optionally, the user can choose to set the Macintosh space bar or use the mouse to trigger a cue. (See Figure#4) The Activity indicator spins to display whenever a cue is in progress of executing.

Figure #4
setting playback options



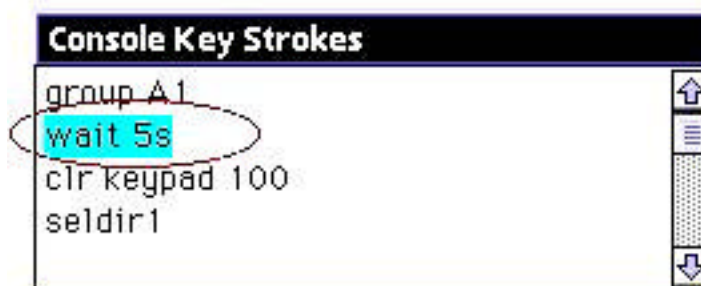
Editing of a VLQ cue can be performed easily in the console keystroke window. The window works like a text editor that allows the user to add additional keystrokes by placing the insertion point cursor within the text string and typing the text strings in manually.

Key Features

Wait times

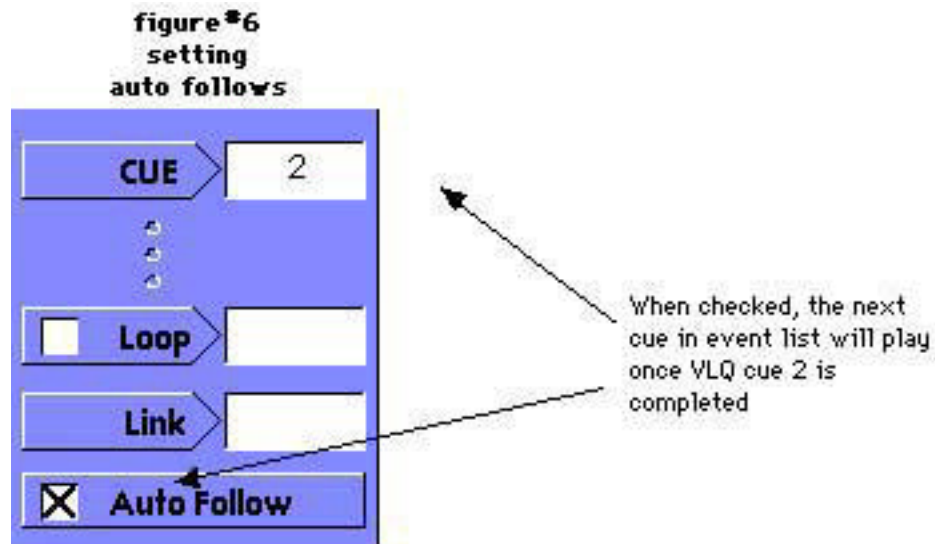
Wait times are directly typed into the console's keystroke window. Inserting wait times allows the user to set specified delay times within a VLQ cue. The illustration (See Figure #5) shows that a wait time of 5 seconds will occur before cue 100 is entered at the console.

figure #5 wait
times



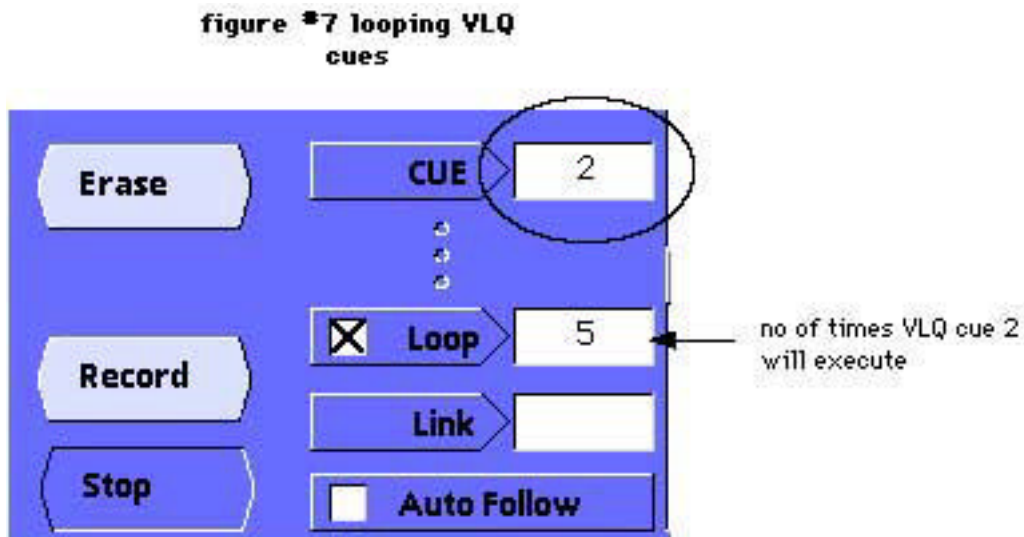
Auto Follows

In addition to Wait times, Auto Follows (See Figure#6) can be assigned to a VLQ cue so that one cue can go straight into the next cue automatically, as opposed to clicking the Play Next button.



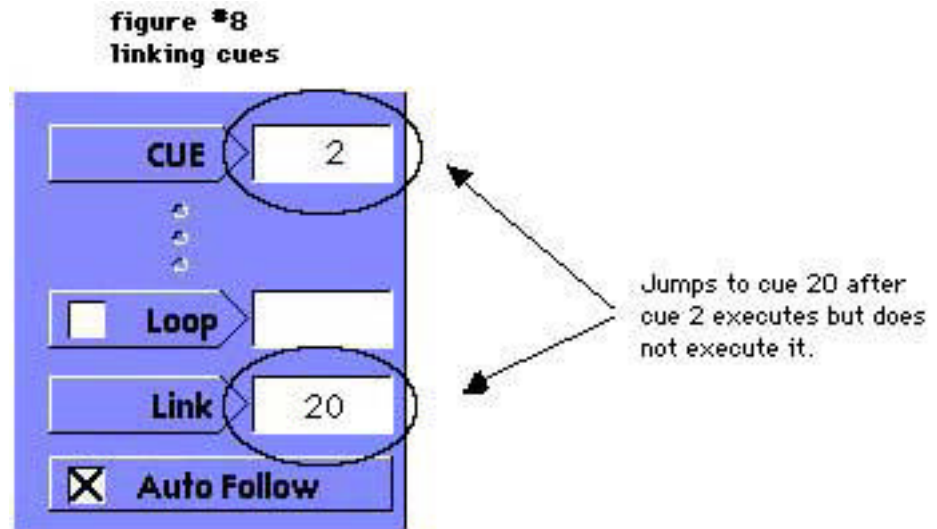
Loops

The Loop function allows for looping a VLQ cue a pre defined number of times. For example, pressing a color button 5 times in succession. (See Figure#7)



Links

A Link can be set to a VLQ cue to jump to a specified cue. (See Figure #8) This shows that cue 2 will jump directly to cue 20 after it executes.



Applications

Here are a few simple applications in which the VLQ program can be used.

Console Macros

To instantly set the console into a state for playback of a certain show sequence, a Macro can be made using the VLQ program to capture all of the keystrokes used to preset the submasters, group selects, chases etc. for playback.

One Button Shows

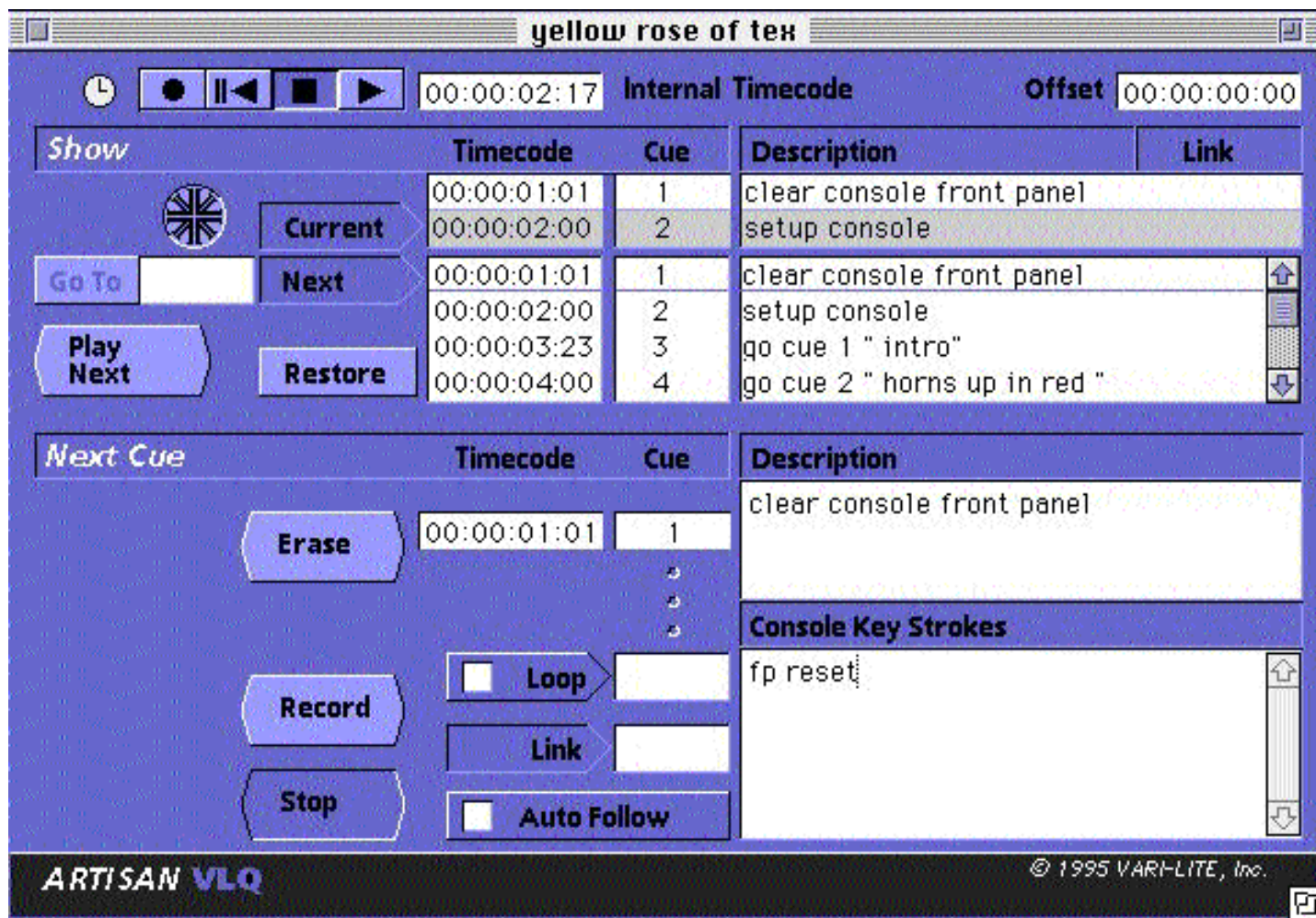
Productions such as Broadway musicals are typically cued in a linear fashion. Events are triggered by verbal commands directed to the console operator from a Stage Manager. The VLQ program can be used to record all console playback events into a string of VLQ cues turning it into a simple "one button show". Since less hands-on time is required at the console this arrangement makes it possible for someone such as technician or electrician, to perform playback of show cues.

Creating a Virtual Chase

The Artisan is limited to 2 Chase submasters. However using the VLQ program, 1 of the 2 Direct submasters could be used to mimic the features of a chase. Use the VLQ record mode to record the console cues that would be used to simulate the chase. Then add Wait times and set the VLQ cue to loop. By varying the wait times it is even possible to create an asynchronous chase loop.

Sneak Preview of VLQ Version 2.0

Below is a screenshot of VLQ version 2.0 which is slated for release sometime before the end of 1996. General changes to the interface include; the ability to resize the interface window, which allows the cue list to fill the entire screen. Also, the display graphics have been altered so that window labels are not mistaken for clickable gadgets, which is a common mistake made by first time users. In addition, the cue list is now printable.



New Show Control Features

One of the limitations of version 1.0 of the VLQ program, was it does not support external triggering from other devices such as a central show control computer. Version 2.0 supports 3 external triggering features including SMPTE Time Code, MIDI note triggering and MIDI Show Control. In order to use the show control features a MIDI interface is attached to one of the serial ports on the Macintosh. In addition, Version 2.0 requires the Open Music System software (OMS) developed by Opcode Systems Inc. to be installed into the Macintosh.

MIDI Time Code Support

Version 2.0 allows an external MIDI Time Code sync to trigger the playback of VLQ cues. A SMPTE-to-MIDI converter box is required to convert analog SMPTE Time Code to MIDI Time Code. Unlike some show control applications in which Time Code is assigned to each keystroke, the VLQ program attaches Time Code to the actual VLQ cue which is made up of a series of keystrokes. Version 2.0 also contains a internal Time Code clock. If the Master time code sync unexpectedly drops out, the internal Time Code clock takes over and continues to execute events until external Time Code is restored.

figure #10
MIDI note assignment table

Click cell next to MIDI Note and type cue number.

Notes	Cues
C -2 0	20
C# -2 1	21
D -2 2	22
D# -2 3	23
E -2 4	24
F -2 5	25
F# -2 6	26
G -2 7	27
G# -2 8	28
A -2 9	28.5
A# -2 10	29
B -2 11	30
C -1 12	31
C# -1 13	32

Cancel

OK

MIDI Show Control

VLQ 2.0 supports 3 MIDI Show Control commands. Those commands are GoXXX, Stop, and GO. The GoXXX message can be used to playback a specified cue number within the VLQ cue list window.

MIDI Note triggering

A MIDI note message can be used to trigger playback of a VLQ cue. A note can be assigned to a VLQ cue using the MIDI note window. (See Figure#10)